



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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wintry blast. The holly bushes are thick with berries, they give a touch of colour to the scene. Snow, rain, and hail can make no difference to their glossy leaves, they have a hidden source of strength denied to oak and elm. Evergreen! I ponder at the word and breathe a prayer that in my varied life I too may have a secret source of strength, which shall outlast each fiery trial, and find me true at last. Winter has its beauties too, rare and exquisite. Sometimes my garden is a fairyland, dazzlingly white and beautiful. Snow-flakes and frost have decked each bare branch, and festooned every angle and nook. Asleep under the warm snow, deep, deep down, my little snowdrops lie, waiting for spring. Under that white carpet, earth holds many treasures ; they wait too until the day shall break. In spite of the keen air I linger in my grounds to dream of spring. The winter sun is sinking rapidly behind a bank of snow clouds. Soon it will rise in a far-off land, wakening a weary world from slumber. One day it will rise for me in a far-off land, to set no more, for "there shall be no night there." It is a symbol of an eternal truth, as all things in Nature are to him who reads aright.

"Nor is in field or garden anything,
But, duly looked into, contains, serene,
The substance of things hoped for, in the Spring,
And evidence of Summer, not yet seen."

Patmore.

AT PLAY.*

BY EDITH ESCOMBE.

"Between the dark and the daylight,
When the night is beginning to lower,
Comes a pause in the day's occupations,
That is known as the children's hour."

IT is such a mistaken idea to think that children must always be amused. I have known grown-up people become martyrs to this erroneous notion, till the children concerned have grown into insatiable tyrants demanding, during their stay downstairs, the exclusive attention of the room.

"The Children's Hour" should, I think, be recognised as a time to be devoted to their amusement and entertainment, but beyond this I consider children ought to play by themselves. The unstudied play of children together is infinitely more entertaining than the set games we teach them. Left to themselves imagination runs riot ; chairs are rapidly converted into horses, carriages, trains, motors, beds, houses, whatever corresponds to the particular bent of the moment ; any old covering serves for a table-cloth to be spread for a picnic ; any ash-tray or paper-weight does service for plates and cups, and with the profound solemnity of children at play, the meal proceeds ; the dancing class is repeated in decorous style ; once again a chair serves as piano whilst arm exercises and steps are repeated in serious make-believe. Shop, that game of all ages, is enacted with more or less realism according to the leniency of those in charge—and who could deny the pleasure of real rice, sago and barley, even if it should necessitate the later manipulation of shovel and broom, when the children have decamped ? Failing these actual joys children will play with empty pots and pans and imaginary coin, and buy and sell and barter to their hearts' content.

Were it possible I would exclude tin toys from every nursery, horrid outcome—with their dangerous ill-finished corners,

* [Discussion is invited.—ED.]

and disagreeable rattle on the bare cork carpet--of an age of mechanism.

The modern child will rarely play at horses nowadays, everything becomes a train or motor; there may be the actual toy train or again it may be the ever-adaptable chair, or merely bricks with one placed upright for the engine. How I hate trains! And when I say so the face of the modern child expresses blank dismay. I am given pencil and paper and asked to draw. What shall it be? An engine. I am asked to cut out in paper. What shall I do? Signals. I suggest showing pictures to a modern three-year-old; in response he selects from a number of periodicals, *The Railway Magazine*, and pointing to the illustrations of different locomotives, asks me, "What noise does that one make?" I puff till I am breathless in remote imitation of an engine at starting, I painfully squeak on a high-pitched note, and still I am asked, "And what noise does *that one* make?" I turn to a pile of children's books—trains, motors, battleships, engine rooms, hideous products of this age of iron.

It is a matter of wonder that the realism in modern toys does not destroy imagination; beautifully modelled skin-clad animals of the Noah's ark, perfectly harnessed horse that takes in and out of the cart with real sacks, the model perambulator, ticket-puncher, gun and gun-carriage, shop, kitchen, stove, minute replicas of every imaginable domestic utensil, mechanical toys that wind up and run by themselves—yet, oddly enough a child will often choose in preference some common-place every-day object and imagine the rest for himself.

With regard to the hour in the evening which, in every right-minded house, is recognised as exclusively belonging to the children, I think it should be treated as a festive occasion, to be celebrated in mildly festive frocks and suits, and only enjoyed after much brushing and combing of hair, and washing of face and hands. Furthermore it must be distinctly understood that this visit to the drawing-room is not an opportunity for romping, for climbing over sofas and chairs, still less for creeping underneath them.

I think those parents are wisest who devote this time to teaching and playing games. The correct playing of games

is a great incentive to sharpening a child's intelligence and training his powers of observation. All games, to be played well, require concentrated attention and prompt action, and can easily be chosen with regard to the varying ages of children. It is in this matter of games that fathers can be such delightful companions. There are men who will play with the month-old baby and enjoy it, but such fathers do not belong to the majority. Once a child is two years old he can intelligently join in simple games, and from that age onwards he might often be included in the play of the elder children.

These evenings can be made so varied. Has the day been wet and the usual outings omitted, the children can be set to dance, an exercise they always love; of quiet amusements there is an infinite variety of choice. If mothers are musical it must be a delight to them, as well as to the children, to teach the nursery rhymes they learnt themselves so long ago. Games learnt in childhood are usually played well in after life, and repay the time and trouble expended in teaching. A boy who can hold his own at billiards as well as in more sporting out-door games is sure to get on well at school and college, and will be more popular than his less well-equipped contemporary. In the present day it is essential for young people to play some game if they are not to be passed over and finally left out of everything. Children accustomed to playing with good players at home are less likely when they go to school to become infatuated with games to the exclusion of all other interests, which is too much the modern tendency, and therefore to be guarded against.

The pleasantest and most easy way of entertaining children is to read aloud to them, whilst at the same time it affords endless opportunity of widening a child's knowledge by the explanation of words, scenes, and situations that lie beyond his immediate scope. Children will often listen more readily to verse than they will to prose, and nowadays it is so easy to find well-written poetry for children; judiciously chosen, there are many passages suitable to a child's understanding in the writings of our leading poets, and pieces that make an impression on the child-mind are rarely forgotten.

I cannot say I care for the ordinary versions of the old

fairy tales ; "Blue-Beard" is bloodthirsty and gruesome ; the tone of "Cinderella" is all wrong ; "Beauty and the Beast" is entirely unadaptable for children, and the same holds good of many of the much-vaunted tales of this calibre. On the other hand Hans Andersen is an ideal teller of tales and suited to the understanding of any child.

I would never restrict the reading of children who have begun to pick and choose for themselves. A child's mind is pure and he will only find purity where the less guileless reader might see evil. Even the most modern novel can make no plainer revelation of human nature than the child may meet with in the books of the Old Testament. A child, till it knows evil, is incapable of seeing evil. Children brought up to "abhor that which is evil" will pass through the fire unsinged. If we are always thinking of evil, and planning how children are to be sheltered from the least breath of contamination, the chances are that, when the full blast accosts them, they will fall amongst the first victims. Let us think no evil for children, only let us strive to make the life around them so good and true and pure that there may be no fear of evil in their thoughts.

Play-time—equally with lesson-time—is helping to build up men and women. There is honour in games, fair-play, chivalry, *esprit de corps*, attributes pertaining to the best men and women of every age. Parents of necessity trust their children's studies to duly qualified teachers ; let them reserve this hour of play-time for themselves, and I doubt not but that these single hours will have a greater influence on the children's character than all the hours of the day's lessons put together.

We call it "The Children's Hour," surely it might with equal relevance be termed "The Parent's Hour." Mothers and fathers are learning much of their children's nature and character, they are themselves under the direct observation of the children—and there is little that escapes those bright penetrating eyes. We may be watching them, but at the same time they are watching us, and by our conduct we rise or fall in their estimation ; it is the consistency of our behaviour that is creating the standard by which they will later judge others.

"Scale How" Tuesdays.*

JOHN MILTON.

BY M. E. OWEN.

JOHN MILTON, the poet, was born in Bread Street, London, on the 9th December, 1608. Nature had done her best for him, both in person and mind, and at a very early age he began to raise in his father great hopes of his future capabilities. When only ten years old he showed symptoms of poetic gifts, but the earliest lines we have showing abundant promise of his future greatness are those "On the Death of a fair Infant," beginning

"Oh fairest flower, no sooner blown but blasted,"
and ending :—

"Then thou the mother of so sweet a child,
Her false-imagined loss cease to lament,
And wisely learn to curb thy sorrows wild ;
Think what a present thou to God has sent,
And render Him with patience what he lent ;
This if thou do He will an offspring give,
That till the world's last end shall make thy name to live."

These lines were written by Milton in his seventeenth year. When ten years old the poet's father engaged a tutor for his instruction—Mr. Thomas Young. From the first the boy entered into study with extraordinary eagerness, and thus began that course of overstraining and weakness of the eyes which was to end in total blindness. When about sixteen

[* Our readers may remember our note about "Scale How Tuesdays," in the *Parents' Review* for September, 1903. It is the custom at the House of Education for one or another student to read an appreciation of some favourite author or composer, illustrated by extracts or compositions read or performed by some of those present. The information is of course gathered from such sources as were available. We venture to think that this should be a pleasant custom in families ; so a series will be published month by month, in order to familiarise our readers with the plan. Even the younger members of a family would enjoy taking part in the readings.—ED.]